

Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

Wetlands, Wilderness and Wildlife at Big Hill Pond

By Fran Wallas

At Big Hill Pond State Park in Pocahtontas, you don't have to hike very far from your car to sense that you are in a very special place.

This is a park where you can find solitude and the feel of wilderness. When you explore the wetlands you may be lucky enough to spot an otter, muskrat, or mink. You will also see migrating birds in the late fall or early winter. The trail begins at the edge of the Travis McNatt Lake. Begin the hike on the trail to the right. This hike is about five miles and is perfect for a short winter day.

The trail follows the lake with scenic views all along the way and crosses a short boardwalk area on your left. Follow the trail blazes along the other side of the lake until you get to a trail sign leading to the Grassy Point shelter. This is a short detour. Depending on the time of day, you may want to stop here for a snack, lunch, or stay in the shelter for the night. The shelter sleeps six people.

Back track to the trail and turn left. Continue on the trail until you get to an old roadbed/horse trail. There are both white and red blazes on the trees. Turn left and follow the road until you get to a site with signs that give you several choices. One sign leads to the tower and the other sign leads "Back to Dam." This is a good place to sit with your friends to

decide which way to go or to wait for friends who decide to hike to the tower. The 70-foot tower is well worth a side trip if you want to get a bird's eye view of the whole area. The hike to the dam goes across the levee with scenic views down the length of the lake.

After crossing the levee, hike up the steep hill to a gate and gravel parking. Turn left on the trail that is just behind the gate. The trail winds for several miles through the woods. Follow the blazes until you come to a beautiful bridge. Cross the bridge and turn left to get back to the starting point of your hike. Check with the ranger and trail map to see how to extend the hike to make a larger loop. If you have more time and energy, you will especially want to add the Dismal Swamp section to your hike.



Dismal Swamp at Big Hill Pond State Park in Pocahtontas.
Below: Travis McNatt Lake at Big Hill Pond State Park.



Beech Trees, like this one along the trail at Big Hill Pond State Park in Pocahtontas, are among the last to lose their leaves in fall.

Directions

Take Highway 40 to Jackson and follow Highway 45 south toward Corinth. Be careful to follow all of the Highway 45 twists and turns. When you reach the town of Eastview, turn right, and go west on Highway 57 about 10 miles to the entrance of the park. Drive straight on the park entrance road until the road ends at the lake. The trail begins at the lake edge to your right and left. Trail maps are available at the park office.

Big Hill Pond State Park



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville.)

